

(Translation)

(Letterhead of the Hong Kong Federation of Women)

**Views of the Hong Kong Federation of Women
on the Initial Report on the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
under Article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of
All Forms of Discrimination against Women**

According to Article 3 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW):

“States Parties shall take in all fields, in particular in the political, social, economic and cultural fields, all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men.”

The Government pointed out in the Report that the setting up a “Women’s Commission” is considered neither necessary nor desirable because at the top level of the Administration, the Policy Groups have already provided the necessary co-ordination among the various bureaux. In addition, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), an independent statutory body, is in place to promote equal opportunities between the two genders and implement the Sex Discrimination Ordinance. However, the Hong Kong Federation of Women (the Federation) has reservations about the Government’s views.

While the Policy Groups at the top level of the Administration have provided co-ordination among the various bureaux, they only provided co-ordination in a general sense. Their purpose is to cushion contradictions among various departments and co-ordinate the division of labour and resources allocation in the departments so as to improve efficiency, without focusing on women’s perspectives in their policy objectives. It should be noted that women are unique and independent individuals. There must be a mechanism to monitor the administration of policies from the perspectives of women so that the uniqueness and needs of women will be addressed in the formulation and implementation of policies and services relating to women. This mechanism may be instituted centrally. It can also be placed under the Executive and Legislative Councils by making reference to the practices in other countries.

While there is the EOC in Hong Kong, it is responsible for the implementation of the three anti-discrimination ordinances, namely the Sex Discrimination Ordinance, Disability Discrimination Ordinance and Family Status Discrimination Ordinance, with a view to promoting equal opportunities and eliminating discrimination in society. However, in order to achieve gender equality as provided for in CEDAW, it is necessary for the Government to set up a mechanism exclusively responsible for women affairs. The purpose of this mechanism is to formulate, co-ordinate, implement and monitor the existing and newly-introduced services and policies in relation to women. While the EOC is actively promoting equality between the two genders, it cannot be regarded as a dedicated body responsible for women affairs judging from its role and functions. This view is also shared by Dr Fanny CHEUNG, the Chairperson of EOC.

Apart from putting in place a mechanism exclusively responsible for women affairs, the Federation suggests that the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government should also set up a “Women Services Fund” to tie in with the development of this mechanism. In fact, there are at present many non-profit-making women organizations providing a diversity of services to women from different sectors in the community but regrettably, many plans have to be aborted due to limited funds, thus impeding further development in the quality, quantity and scope of women services. Besides, popular activities organized for the well-being of women are unable to be extended for the benefit of more women. With the establishment of the fund for women organizations to seek funding for their activities, the quality and quantity of women services will not be jeopardized by the lack of resources. Meanwhile, it will also facilitate the provision of more innovative services as and when appropriate, such as retraining programmes, inexpensive child-care services, support for women who are unemployed and in poverty, assistance for the newly arrived women and women at risk, as well as health services for women.

The Federation believes that with the establishment of a mechanism exclusively responsible for women affairs and focusing on women’s perspectives in the administration of policies, the objectives and direction for the development of women services will be identified more clearly. Besides, it will also facilitate changes in the society’s traditional perception of women, thereby strengthening women’s sense of identity and raising their status through a shift in the fundamental social values. The setting up of a “Women Services Fund” will also facilitate a better use of the existing human resources (i.e. women organizations) and greatly improve the existing services, in both quality and quantity. This will enable women to give full play to their potentials and encourage them to improve themselves and become independent, confident and dignified individuals so that women can compete on an equal footing with men in respect of education, employment, personal development, and also in daily lives and society. This will pave the way for gender equality in the HKSAR as provided for in CEDAW.

Under Article 7 of CEDAW:

“States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right:

- a) to vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;
- b) to participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;
- c) to participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.”

As regards women participation in rural elections, it is stated in the Report that there are about 700 villages in the New Territories with about 1 000 village representatives. Among them, 10 women are serving as village representatives, two women are serving as Executive Committee members of the Rural Committees whereas five are Councillors of the Heung Yee Kuk. The Federation is very pleased to see that women’s participation in rural elections has been improved as such, breaking the traditional monopoly of rural elections by men. However, the Federation must emphasize that this achievement is attributed to the efforts of women in the New Territories and local women organizations. Equality between the two genders does not come naturally and hinges on the support and promotional efforts of the institutions concerned. In this connection, the HKSAR Government should expeditiously establish a mechanism exclusively responsible for women affairs and draw up a long-term women policy, with a view to promoting the development of women services. The Federation believes that the establishment of such a mechanism will help addressing the special situations of women in the New Territories, raising their status and protecting their rights and interests. As a result, women in the New Territories can be treated on equal terms with men in all aspects, particularly with regard to matters relating to rural elections.

(Signed)
Peggy LAM (Mrs)
Chairman

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